

# Kentucky Literacy Link

Volume 1. Number 9

A Publication of the Kentucky Department of Education

December 2010

Rebecca Woosley, editor

WISHING YOU THE JOYS  
OF THE SEASON



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SPECIAL FOCUS – The New Standards –  
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STRATEGY – Everyday Words

Your questions and your contributions of ideas/lessons that work are welcome. E-mail those to [rebecca.woosley@education.ky.gov](mailto:rebecca.woosley@education.ky.gov), and they may be included in this **literacy link** to connect teachers across the state by sharing insights, bright ideas and best practices.

## Items of Interest

### A New Writing Resource

A Writing Policy Guidance Tool WebEx is now available on the KDE website. This resource is designed to guide schools and district personnel through the process of using the *Writing Policy Guidance Tool* to review and provide feedback on a school's writing policy.

<http://www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Instructional+Resources/Literacy/Kentucky+Writing+Program/Writing+Policy+Guidance.htm>

Using a draft policy from X High School and an annotated version of the *Writing Policy Guidance Tool*, which are both available at the same Web link, the WebEx explains and models the process for districts. Each school is required by statute ([KRS 158.6453](#)) to have a writing policy.

Follow the link to the WebEx located at the top of the page. Both the annotated copy of the *Writing Policy Guidance Tool* and a sample policy from X High School can be located by scrolling to the bottom of that page.

## KCTE/LA 75th Anniversary Conference

Teaching Moving Forward/Looking Back – 21st Century and Learning

**When? February 25 and 26, 2011**

**Where? Marriott – Cincinnati at River Center**

Here is a peek at some of what's in store for this year's conference.

- ✚ Terry Holliday, Commissioner of Education, will provide the opening address.
- ✚ Sara Kajder, author of *Adolescents and Digital Literacies: Learning Alongside Our Students* and the featured speaker at the 2010 NCTE convention, will share her expertise.
- ✚ Kentucky Department of Education consultants will discuss the ELA Common Core Standards with an

emphasis on implementation at elementary, middle and high school.

- Audrey Harper, of South Warren High School, will present a session about incorporating traditional texts with 21st-century literacies.
- Amy Cody, of Walton-Verona Middle School, will discuss formative assessment and how it can make the teacher and student more efficient in the classroom.

To register and receive more complete information, visit <http://www.kcte.org/>.



## College and Career Readiness Standards - A Spotlight on Language

**“The first curriculum priority is language. Our use of complex symbols separates humans from all other forms of life. Language provides the connecting tissue that binds society together, allowing us to express feelings and ideas, and powerfully influence the attitudes of others. It is the most essential tool for learning. Language is the means by which all other subjects are pursued.”**

- Ernest L. Boyer – (quoted in NCTE Guidelines)

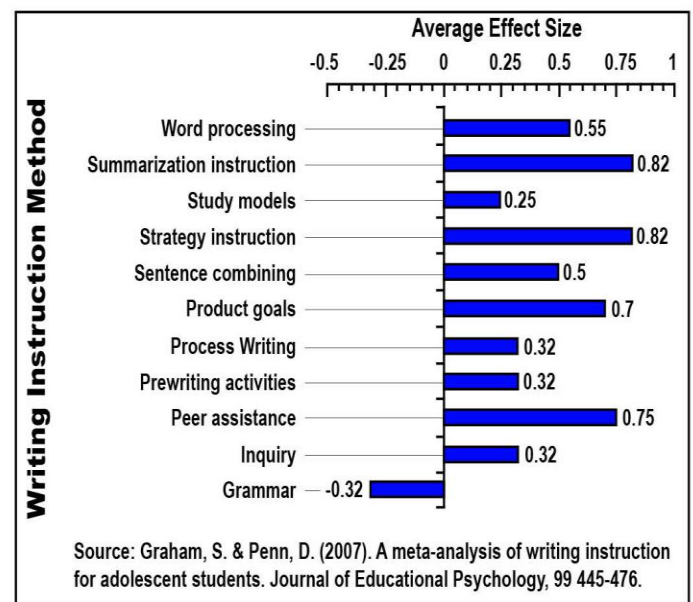
Language is a strand in Kentucky’s Core Academic Standards for English/Language Arts, and some may wonder why it is not a part of the reading or writing standards. The Kentucky Core Academic Standards document indicates that making language standards a separate strand does not imply “that skills related to conventions, effective language use and vocabulary are unimportant to reading, writing, speaking and listening.” Quite the contrary, as Boyer articulates so well. Language skills are a vital component of literacy instruction. A closer look reveals three clusters in the language standards: *Conventions of Standard English*, *Knowledge of Language* and *Vocabulary*

*Acquisition and Use*. Effective language instruction that helps students acquire these skills will have an impact on them as writers, speakers and readers.

## College and Career Readiness (CCR) Language Standards – One, Two and Three

Language standards one and two under *Conventions of Standard English* indicate that students can demonstrate a command of Standard English grammar and usage when they speak or write and a command of the Standard English conventions of capitalization, punctuation and spelling when they write. (To see a quick snapshot of the progression of these standards by grade, look at the chart on page 30 or on page 56 of the English/Language Arts standards.) Language standard three, under *Knowledge of Language*, requires that students can understand language functions in different contexts so they can make effective language choices and so they can accurately interpret what they hear and read.

### What Research Shows:



The chart above shows the relative effect size of each of the writing instruction methods included in the meta-analysis conducted by Graham and Perin. Of particular note is the negative effect size of grammar instruction, which they defined as, “explicit and systematic (e.g., the study of parts of speech and sentences).”

Although teaching grammar and usage as isolated skills is still a common practice, research evidence clearly affirms that when students use their own writing as the context for learning, rather than ‘skill and drill’ learning, the impact on their command of grammar in writing is greater (Calkins, 1980;

DiStefano and Killion, 1984). Five years later, the conclusions from George Hillock's study leave no room for equivocation. "If schools insist upon teaching the identification of parts of speech, the parsing or diagramming of sentences, or other concepts of traditional grammar..., they cannot defend it as a means of improving the quality of writing (1989)." Hillocks further indicated, "In some studies a heavy emphasis on mechanics and usage resulted in significant losses in overall [writing] quality."

Research evidence confirms the most effective and relevant way to improve students' grammar and usage skills, and also their communication skills, is to tie instruction to the revision and editing they do with their own writing. This individualizes and differentiates the learning, assuring all learners' needs are met.

The ultimate objective is for Kentucky students to graduate with the skills and knowledge that prepare them for college and careers. Consequently, their control of grammar and usage in written and spoken English is a necessity when they enter the academic world or the world of their chosen profession. Because of the variety of communication modes in their 21st-century world, it's vital that students have the ability to intentionally and effectively **apply** written and spoken grammar and usage skills (Fogel & Ehri, 2000; Wheeler & Swords, 2004). What's more, the ability to choose and apply language effectively will help students communicate clearly and achieve their goals.

Someday the students in today's classrooms may design and pitch a project, propose an ad campaign, guide someone thousands of miles away through a difficult procedure or even collaborate in making a discovery that could change people's lives. Whatever they do, students will need command of Standard English grammar and usage **so they can communicate clearly and effectively**. They also will need a working knowledge of language functions. While they may initially communicate orally, they will ultimately have to do so in writing as well. When they do, their command and control of grammar, usage, conventions and language functions will be essential. Research cited in the Kentucky Academic Core Standards also validates that students' knowledge of grammar and usage, coupled with their language knowledge, will support their reading comprehension and interpretation skills. That knowledge and those vital literacy skills will support their need to understand the complex academic and technical texts students will ultimately encounter.

## College and Career Readiness (CCR) Language Standards – Four, Five and Six

According to numerous research studies, one of the biggest barriers for struggling readers is knowledge of vocabulary. Not surprising, explicit vocabulary instruction is one of the most effective classroom and intervention practices (Kamil et al, 2008). Language standards four, five and six, included in the *Vocabulary Acquisition and Use* cluster, specifically address the requirement for students to be able to

- ◆ determine the meaning of unknown words
- ◆ understand the relationship of words
- ◆ accurately acquire and use a range of academic and domain-specific words so they can independently comprehend what they hear and what they read

There are multiple ways to guide students' vocabulary development, but it's vital for teachers to understand what kinds of strategies work and what kinds don't work.

"There are a number of traditional teaching practices related to vocabulary that deserve to be left in the 'instructional dustbin'" (Kinsella et al, 2002). Teaching practices that don't give students enough opportunities to use the vocabulary or to have rich interactions with it are the least effective. Those ineffective methods include asking students to copy the definitions of words they've looked up in the dictionary, asking students to use the words in a sentence **before they've had multiple interactions with the word** and asking students to engage in the rote practice of simply memorizing the meanings of words without really understanding them (Kinsella). While all these activities do involve students in doing something with new vocabulary, the students are passive - not active - learners. Kelly Gallagher emphasizes the importance of turning students into "meaning makers" instead of memorizers (2009). What teachers need, instead of 'dustbin' strategies, are proven vocabulary instruction practices that work.

Research about vocabulary instruction confirms that in order for the practice to be effective, the student must be asked to do more than just identify and repeat a definition. Instead, the instructional strategy needs to help students build the mental bridge between what is new and what they already know. Effective vocabulary instruction depends on some basic, research-tested practices: integrating the new vocabulary with students' prior knowledge, providing students repeated opportunities to hear, see or use new vocabulary and assuring

that those frequent opportunities occur in meaningful reading, writing and speaking contexts (Nagy).

Because research shows that the practice that makes the largest vocabulary acquisition impact is the amount of reading students do from a wide variety of texts, students need more opportunities for independent reading. When students write and when they speak, their grammar, usage and vocabulary converge. Kirby and Liner asserted that “control follows fluency” (1988). They further indicated that fluency with vocabulary and language usage skills improve together. Often, when that happens, students reading skills improve as well. The ultimate outcome is a literate citizen.

#### References:

Calkins, L.M. (1980). When children want to punctuate: Basic skills belong in context. *Language Arts*, 57.

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Kirby, D., Liner, T. & Vinz, R. (1988). *Inside Out: Developmental Strategies for Teaching Writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Nagy, W. (1988). *Teaching Vocabulary to Improve Reading Comprehension*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

*NCTE Guidelines*. (1999) More than a Number: Why Class Size Matters. Available online at <http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/whyclasssizematters> Accessed December 1, 2010.

Wheeler, R. & Swords, R. (2004). Code-switching: Tools of language and culture transform the dialectally diverse classroom. *Language Arts*, 81.

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**“In this box are all the words I know,” he said. “Most of them you will never need, some you will use constantly, but with them you may ask all the questions which have never been asked. All the great books of the past and all the ones yet to come are made with these words. With them there is no obstacle you cannot overcome. All you must do is use them well and in the right places.”**

(words spoken by the king of Dictionopolis about the gift he gave young Milo when he sent him on a journey)

Juster, N. (1961). *The Phantom Tollbooth*. New York: Scholastic.

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## Turning the Page

### Sharing a Literacy Strategy - *EVERYDAY WORDS*

This strategy involves students in the process of connecting new vocabulary knowledge to prior knowledge through reading, writing, speaking and listening (Beers).

#### What to do:

- Before you introduce a new topic or concept, ask students to choose three words they do not know from a list of important words that you provide them.
- Ask them to cite the page and give the context where the word is used, if they encounter the words in a text. In addition, ask them to use that information to write an explanation of what the word means. (They can record this in their personal, ongoing literacy journal.)
- If they encounter the word used by guest speakers, by the teacher, in videos or from other digital sources, ask them to record the word and the context in their literacy journal. Again, ask them to use the

information about how the word is used in context to write an explanation of what the word means.

- In all cases, ask students to record any connections they make between the new vocabulary and prior knowledge they have. (For example, if in their science class they learned that *hydro-* means water, and the new term from a text they are reading in English is *hydrophobia*, they may be able to use their knowledge of the word stem [old knowledge] to understand the meaning of the new word [new knowledge].)
- Ask students to create a visual representation to go along with their written explanation of what the word means.
- Provide students who selected the same words with an opportunity to share their work in peer teams to reinforce what they have learned. If 'matching' teams aren't possible, build teams around one shared word. The exposure to additional experience with the different words from other students still expands their vocabulary acquisition opportunities.

### A Critical Part of the Learning Process:

Help students process their learning by asking them:

- how they determined which words to choose from the list
- to write a note to themselves in a literacy journal about how they can apply the same strategy to new words they need to learn on their own

### What Next? And So What?

Although this is a seemingly simple strategy, it employs Nagy's critical components of integration, repetition and meaningful use. To extend that use, encourage students to notice and make connections whenever they encounter those new words in various contexts.

Don't stop with just three words. The reality is that those probably won't be the only words on the list that are unfamiliar to students. Extend this activity to include additional words, but do it with a different twist. If there are some key words or concept terms that all students must understand as the foundation for future learning, instead of asking students to explain their words and visuals to their team, ask teams to "teach" their words to the rest of the class.

This extension activity opens the door for teachers to model some additional effective instructional strategies students could use in the vocabulary "lesson" their group teaches – such as using mnemonic devices or visual representations to make connections and embed the words in long-term memory. This

also allows teachers to formatively assess student learning during the group 'teaching' process and engages students in an empowering thinking and learning process they can repeat independently.

One last thought - don't miss the opportune 'teachable-moment;' engage students in reflection about what they learned and how they can use what they've learned independently when they encounter unfamiliar vocabulary. Their personal literacy journals are the ideal places to capture those reflections, because they can become a valuable resource to support them or to remind them of techniques they **own** and can use **on their own**.

The *Everyday Word* strategy and several others are available from the resource listed below as a reference. Other vocabulary resources are included in the *Check out these links* section that follows.

Reference:

Beers, S. (2008). *Adolescent Literacy: An ASCD Action Tool*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.



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### Check out these links...

#### ***The Literacy Web***

This website, sponsored by the University of Connecticut, includes a rich resource of classroom vocabulary acquisition strategies for all age and ability levels available at the click of a mouse. It also offers long lists of reading comprehension strategies for all students, including ESL students.

<http://www.literacy.uconn.edu/compre.htm>

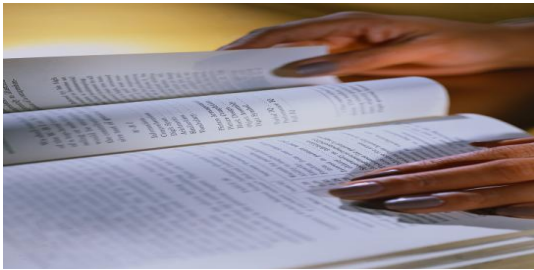
#### ***Education Week Vocabulary 'Bright Idea'***

This short article shares a great idea for using wikis to develop students' vocabulary. It also offers "how to" directions for teachers, plus ways to work with school or district technology personnel to facilitate student access to wikis.



[http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/leading\\_from\\_the\\_classroom/2010/11/are\\_your\\_students\\_using\\_wikis\\_to\\_strengthen\\_vocabulary\\_skills.html?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=feed&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+Leading+FromTheClassroom+%28Leading+From+the+Classroom%29](http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/leading_from_the_classroom/2010/11/are_your_students_using_wikis_to_strengthen_vocabulary_skills.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+Leading+FromTheClassroom+%28Leading+From+the+Classroom%29)

## **Suggested Reading**



**Merritt, T. (2010). Finding the Will to Individualize Instruction: How My Son Made Me a Better Teacher. *English Journal* 100 (2).**

An article just published in November by Kentucky teacher Tonya Merritt (Paul Laurence Dunbar High, Fayette County), focuses on differentiating instruction, guiding students to make connections to their world and celebrating their progress, instead of measuring their achievements against a predetermined norm.

**Bigelow, T.P. & Vokoun, M.J. (2005) *“What Choice Do I Have” Reading, Writing and Speaking Activities that Empower Students*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.**

The authors of this book provide research from recognized educators supporting the impact on learning and engagement when students are given the option of choice when reading, writing or speaking. Their book offers lessons, activities and projects (tested in classroom) that in their words, “put students in the drivers’ seat.” It also offers suggestions for cross-discipline and differentiated instruction.

**Gallagher, K. (2006). *Teaching Adolescent Writers*. Portland: Stenhouse.**

Gallagher identifies six needs that are essential skills for student writers. One of those keys is choice - a key element required in 2009’s Senate Bill 1.

**Hoyt, L. with other leading experts. (2005). *Spotlight on Comprehension: Building a Literacy of Thoughtfulness*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.**

Contributors to the user-ready strategies for building students reading comprehension skills in this text include Ellin Keene, Tony Snead, Nell Duke, Franki Sibberson and many others. Strategies for building vocabulary and using writing to build reading comprehension are part of the focus of this rich, research-based text.

## **Contact Us**

Cindy Parker

Sandra Hamon

Rebecca Woosley

Pam Wininger

Renee Boss

Linda Holbrook

Carol Franks

Kim Willhoite

April Pieper

Kathy Mansfield, Library/Media Specialist consultant

### **Kentucky Department of Education**

Office of Next Generation Learners

**500 Mero Street**

**Frankfort KY 40601**

**Phone: (502) 564-2106**

E-mail: first.last name@education.ky.gov

